

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 03908 131157Z

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8686

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3908

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJ: PESSIMISM AROUND THE PALACE

1. SUMMARY. NORTHERN MARONITE POLITICAL LEADER RENE MOUAWAD AND G-2 JOHNNY ABDO BOTH FEEL THAT, FROM THE STANDPOINT OF HIS OWN SKILL AT THE JOB, PRESIDENT SARKIS SHOULD RESIGN, BUT IN THE PRESENT SITUATION IT WOULD BE DISASTROUS FOR THE COUNTRY. MOUAWAD SEES NO POSSIBLE SOLUTION IF THE PRESIDENT DOES RESIGN OTHER THAN THE COLLAPSE OF THE GOVERNMENT GENERALLY. THEIR GENERAL PESSIMISM IS SHARED BY KARIM PAKRADOUNI OF THE PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU (SEPTEL). END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFFS CALLED ON KARIM PAKRADOUNI AT BAABDA PALACE ON JULY 11 (SEPTEL) AND THEREAFTER ALSO MET WITH RENE MOUAWAD, DEPUTY FROM ZGHARTA AND HEAD OF THE MOUAWAD FAMILY CLAN, AND
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 03908 131157Z

ARMY G-2 CHIEF JOHNNY ABDO. GABY LAHOUD, G-2 UNDER FORMER PRESIDENT CHEHAB, ALSO DROPPED BY BRIEFLY. (COMMENT: LAHOUD HAS LIVED MOSTLY IN SPAIN SINCE HIS VIRTUAL EXILE FROM LEBANON IN 1972, WHEN FORMER PRESIDENT SAUEIMAN FRANJIYAH DISMANTLED THE CHEHABIST G-2 APPARATUS, BUT HE OCCASIONALLY POPS IN BEIRUT TO TALK TO PRESIDENT SARKIS AND OTHERS, SEEMINGLY USUALLY IN TIMES OF GOVERNMENTAL CRISES.)

3. MOUAWAD SAID HE SEES NO POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE CURRENT IMPASSE IF PRESIDENT SARKIS IN FACT RESIGNS. THERE IS NO VISIBLE NEW PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. EVEN IF THERE WERE, IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THE PARLIAMENT TO MEET TO ELECT HIM. IF THE PARLIAMENT CONVENED AT VILLA MANSOUR IN BEIRUT ALONG THE TRADITIONAL CONFRONTATION LINE, THERE WOULD BE EXTREME PHYSICAL DANGER, AND THERE MIGHT NOT BE A QUORUM. IF THE PARLIAMENT MET AT SHTAWRA (AS IT DID FOR THE INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT SARKIS IN SEPTEMBER 1976), THE LEBANESE FRONT WOULD VOCIFEROUSLY OBJECT, CLAIMING THAT THE PARLIAMENT WAS BEING INFLUENCED DIRECTLY BY THE SYRIANS. THEY WOULD DISAVOW ON THAT BASIS THE ELECTION OF ANY PRESIDENT NOT TO THEIR LIKING, THAT IS, PRACTICALLY ANYONE EXCEPT CAMILLE CHAMOUN OR PIERRE GEMAYEL THEMSELVES. FIGHTING WOULD THEN RESUME. HE SAID BLUNTLY THAT THE PHALANGE AND NLP WANT PARTITION.

4. ON THE ROLE OF THE ARMY, ABDO SAID THAT, SO FAR, THE ARMY LEADERSHIP WAS SUCCEEDING VERY WELL IN KEEPING OFFICERS AND TROOPS WITH STRONG PRO-LEBANESE FRONT SYMPATHIES IN LINE. HE SEEMED OPTIMISTIC (WHICH MAY BE PURELY PROFESSIONAL) THAT THE ARMY WILL HOLD TOGETHER EVEN IF THE CRISIS DEEPENS. HE THEN ASKED A CURIOUS QUESTION: SHOULD THE ARMY FOLLOW THE POLICY OF THE PRESIDENT OR SHOULD THE PRESIDENT AS IN SO MANY ARAB COUNTRIES, FOLLOW AN ARMY POLICY? (ONE EMBOFF DREW THE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 03908 131157Z

IMPLICATION THAT HE WAS SUGGESTING THAT AT SOME POINT IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY FOR THE ARMY ITSELF TO STEP IN AND TAKE OVER, TO TEST U.S. RESPONSE TO THE IDEA.) ABDO THEN EXPLAINED THAT WHAT HE MEANT WAS THAT, IF THE AUTHORITY OF THE PRESIDENCY WAS FAILING, SHOULD NOT THE PRESIDENT ADOPT A LINE OF ACTION RELYING HEAVILY ON THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE. (OTHER EMBOFF FELT THAT ABDO WAS PROBABLY ONLY MAKING POINT THAT PRESIDENT SHOULD MAKE SURE ARMY CARRIED OUT HIS POLICIES.)

5. ON THE QUESTION OF THEIR OWN VIEWS ABOUT RESIGNATION, BOTH MOUAWAD AND ABDO SAID, WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST HESITATION, THAT, FROM THE STANDPOINT OF PRESIDENT SARKIS' PERSONALITY (BY WHICH THEY MEANT HIS ABILITY IN OFFICE), THE PRESIDENT SHOULD RESIGN, BUT IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT, WITH THE LEBANESE FRONT DEMANDING SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PARTITION, HE SHOULD NOT.

6. COMMENT: MOUAWAD, THE MATURE POLITICIAN, WAS ALMOST TOTALLY PESSIMISTIC. ABDO, YOUNGER AND AGGRESSIVE, SEEMED TO BE THINKING ABOUT DRASTIC ACTIONS, PERHAPS INVOLVING THE ARMY ITSELF, TO SAVE A SINKING SHIP. BOTH REFLECTED THE VIEWPOINT (SIMILAR TO PAKRADOUNI'S) THAT THERE IS NO PURELY

POLITICAL WAY OUT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION.

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